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AUTHORIZATION OF “RADIO FREE AFGHANISTAN”

DECEMBER 14, 2001.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. BIDEN, from the Committee on Foreign Relations,
submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 1779]

The Committee on Foreign Relations, having had under consideration S. 1779, a bill to authorize the establishment of “Radio Free Afghanistan,” and for other purposes, reports favorably with an amendment thereon and recommends that the bill do pass.

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I. PURPOSE

The bill authorizes the establishment of “Radio Free Afghanistan”, an Afghan-language broadcast service within RFE/RL, Incorporated (commonly known as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty).

II. BACKGROUND

From the mid-1980s until the early 1990s, RFE/RL operated an Afghan-language service which broadcast to Afghanistan. It was terminated in 1993 for budgetary reasons. Currently, the Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts a total of six hours per day to Afghani-

stan in two of its major languages, Dari and Pashto (three hours in each language). The most recent survey indicates that it has a substantial audience inside the country.

The need for additional news and information inside the country, both during the ongoing military campaign by the United States and during the forthcoming international effort to rebuild Afghanistan, is self-evident. There are few indigenous media in the country. Afghans have limited access to news, and are starved for truthful information about events in their own country. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), a private corporation funded by the U.S. government, has a long and successful record of conducting “surrogate broadcasting”—providing news and information primarily about the target country, thereby acting as a local news service in the absence of a free and indigenous media. The Committee believes restoration of the Radio Free Afghanistan service will provide an important complement to VOA broadcasts, will assist in the restoration of order in Afghanistan in the near term, and assist in the international effort to build a stable government in the country.

The bill, introduced on December 6, 2001 by Chairman Biden and Senator Helms, authorizes broadcasts in the Dari and Pashto languages by RFE/RL. It authorizes the appropriation of \$8 million in operating costs in Fiscal Year 2002 and \$9 million in capital costs. The funding provides start-up costs, and operating costs to support a total of eight hours of daily broadcasts. This would involve four hours in each language, comprising two hours of original programming and two hours of repeat programming. The capital funding authorized in the bill contemplates construction of a new shortwave transmitter in Kuwait. The Broadcasting Board of Governors has indicated to the Committee that the transmitter will be part new, and part used. The transmitter itself is in storage in Europe, and will be moved to Kuwait; but new antennae will have to be procured.

The bill differs in minor respects from H.R. 2998, which passed the House of Representatives on November 7, 2001. The House-passed bill authorizes funds for both Fiscal Year 2002 and 2003. The Senate bill is limited to the current fiscal year; the Committee believes that funding for Fiscal Year 2003 should be addressed in the normal budget cycle. The House-passed bill also authorizes a higher level of funding—a total of 12 hours per day.

III. COMMITTEE ACTION

The Committee considered S. 1779 at a business meeting held on December 12, 2001. During the meeting, Senator Feingold offered an amendment related to the standards and oversight of Radio Free Afghanistan broadcasting; the amendment was accepted. The Committee ordered the bill reported, as amended, by voice vote.

IV. COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Committee has confidence in the ability of RFE/RL and its leadership to rebuild, in a short time, a credible Radio Free Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it has authorized a reduced level of broadcasting as compared to the House-passed bill because it believes

that, in rebuilding the new service, RFE/RL should proceed carefully, both to ensure quality control and to ensure that the service meets the highest standards of professional journalism. It will take time for the new service to build an audience; credibility is essential to building such an audience. The rapid establishment of the service—from a starting stop to 12 hours per day in a matter of months (as envisaged by the House-passed bill)—risks errors that could threaten the credibility of the new service.

The Committee urges RFE/RL, in the operation of the new Afghan service, to also devote resources to the training of indigenous media. The establishment of a local media will be essential, over the long-term, to stability in the country. Such training is within the mandate of RFE/RL under Section 303(b)(10) of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994. The United States and the international community have made a commitment that it will not walk away from Afghanistan, as it did in 1989 after the Soviet withdrawal. Training of local media is just a small part of that commitment.

During the Committee business meeting, Senator Dodd urged that RFE/RL undertake to rebroadcast the stories of the victims of the September 11 attacks—set forth daily in major U.S. newspapers in recent weeks—as a means of telling the personal stories of that fateful day. The President of RFE/RL (Tom Dine), who was present at the meeting, committed to pursue the idea. The Committee urges all the U.S. international broadcasting services to do the same.

V. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS.

Section 1. Short title

The title of the bill is the “Radio Free Afghanistan Act.”

Section 2. Establishment of Radio Free Afghanistan

Subsection (a) requires that, within 15 days of enactment, RFE/RL, Inc., submit a detailed plan to the Broadcasting Board of Governors for the provision of surrogate broadcasting services in the Dari and Pashto languages to Afghanistan.

Subsection (b) provides the Broadcasting Board of Governors the authority to make grants to RFE/RL, Incorporated once the report required under subsection (a) is submitted. This subsection also supersedes a statutory limit on grants to RFE/RL, Inc. This authority to exceed the limit applies during Fiscal Year 2002 for support of Radio Free Afghanistan.

Subsection (c) makes clear that the authorities applicable to carry out U.S. government international broadcasting activities may be used to carry out Radio Free Afghanistan broadcasts.

Subsection (d) requires the new service to adhere to the same standards of professionalism and accountability, and shall be subject to the same oversight mechanisms, as other services of RFE/RL, Inc.

Section 3. Authorization of Appropriations

This section authorizes \$8,000,000 in operating costs and \$9,000,000 in capital costs in Fiscal Year 2002. The funds appropriated under this section may remain available until expended.

Section 4. Repeal of ban on U.S. transmitter in Kuwait

This section repeals a permanent ban on construction of a U.S. shortwave radio transmitter in Kuwait. The ban was enacted in 1994, at a time of serious budget stringency and in the aftermath of the cancellation of a major transmitter project in Israel. The repeal of the ban is necessary to ensure the construction of a new transmission facility in Kuwait for use for Radio Free Afghanistan. This new facility is necessary because current transmission capabilities in the region are nearing their capacity. The Committee expects that the new transmitter will be used not only for Radio Free Afghanistan, but also for other U.S. international broadcasting. Finally, the Committee notes that in the past, RFE/RL has not been permitted to use U.S.-owned transmitters in Kuwait for broadcast of Radio Free Iraq or RFE/RL's Persian Service. Such restrictions are unacceptable, and the Committee expects both services to broadcast without hindrance or restriction from Kuwait by the end of the year.

VI. COST ESTIMATE

In accordance with rule XXVI, paragraph 11(a) of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides the following estimate of the cost of this legislation prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE
Washington, DC, December 13, 2001.

Hon. JOSEPH R. BIDEN, JR., *Chairman,*
Committee on Foreign Relations,
United States Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN:

The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for S. 1779, the Radio Free Afghanistan Act.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Joseph C. Whitehill, who can be reached at 226-2840.

Sincerely,

DAN L. CRIPPEN, *Director.*

Enclosure:

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

Summary

S. 1779 would authorize the Broadcasting Board of Governors to make a grant for radio broadcasting to the people of Afghanistan

in their local languages. The bill would authorize the appropriation of \$17 million in 2002 to fund the broadcasting. Assuming the appropriation of the authorized amounts, CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost \$15 million over the 2002-2006 period. Because S. 1779 would not affect direct spending or receipts, pay-as-you-go procedures would not apply.

S. 1779 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

Estimated Cost to the Federal Government

The estimated budgetary impact of S. 1779 is shown in the following table. The costs of this legislation fall within budget function 150 (international affairs). The estimate assumes the enactment of this bill and appropriation of the authorized amounts before the end of calendar year 2001. We assume that Radio Free Afghanistan will experience some delays in starting operations, and as a result, would not be able to use all of the 2002 funding.

TABLE 1.—BUDGETARY IMPACT OF THE RADIO FREE AFGHANISTAN ACT
(By fiscal year, in millions of dollars)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
CHANGES IN SPENDING SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATION					
Spending for Broadcasting Board of Governors:					
Authorization Level	17	0	0	0	0
Estimated Outlays	6	6	3	0	0

Pay-As-You-Go Considerations

None.

Intergovernmental and Private-Sector Impact

S. 1779 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in UMRA and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

Previous CBO Estimate

On November 7, 2001, CBO transmitted an estimate for H.R. 2998, the Radio Free Afghanistan Act of 2001, as ordered reported by the House Committee on International Relations on November 1, 2001. The differences between the two estimates reflect the different amounts authorized by the two bills.

Estimate Prepared By

Federal Costs: Joseph C. Whitehill. Impact on State, Local, and Tribal Governments: Elyse Goldman. Impact on the Private Sector: Lauren Marks.

Estimate Approved By

Peter H. Fontaine, *Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis*.

VII. EVALUATION OF REGULATORY IMPACT

In accordance with Rule XXVI, paragraph 11(b) of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee has concluded that there is no regulatory impact from this legislation.

VIII. CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with Rule XXVI, paragraph 12 of the Standing Rules of the Senate, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italic, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995

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Title III—United States International Broadcasting Act

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PART B—USIA AND RELATED AGENCIES AUTHORITIES AND ACTIVITIES

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[SEC. 226. UNITED STATES TRANSMITTER IN KUWAIT.]

【None of the funds authorized to be appropriated by this or any other Act may be obligated or expended for the design, development, or construction of a United States short-wave radio transmitter in Kuwait.】

